UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/49/301
8 August 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-ninth session
Item 108 of the provisional agenda*

REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 48/218, sect. I.B, of 23 December 1993, on the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations, in which it reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, a prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan, taking into account the views expressed by Member States in the Fifth Committee, and decided to give the issue in-depth consideration at its forty-ninth session.

2. The medium-term plan is the Organization's basic strategic document; it is intended to draw together the multiplicity of mandates adopted by Member States to guide the work of the Organization and to distil from them a set of concrete objectives and strategies over a period of six years. The medium-term plan, as approved by the General Assembly, provides the framework for the programme budget. The usefulness of the plan as currently conceived has been increasingly called into question both within the Secretariat and among the Member States. This led the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-second session to recommend that a prototype of a possible new format for the medium-term plan be prepared. 1/ The General Assembly, in its resolution 47/214 of 23 December 1992 endorsed that decision and requested the Secretary-General to submit such a prototype to it at its forty-eighth session, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

---

* A/49/150.

3. The Secretary-General submitted a report to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session containing proposals designed to obtain agreement on the principles by which the current planning system would be revised before developing a prototype for application to programme areas (A/48/277). Those proposals took into account the shortcomings of the current medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, 2/ as identified at a technical seminar held in 1993 to review the experience gained through several decades of planning of the activities of the Organization, and the ideas exchanged among the participants at that seminar. The Assembly reiterated its request that a prototype be prepared, noting the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination 3/ that consideration be given to replacing the current medium-term plan by a document to be approved by the Assembly, containing the following elements:

(a) A perspective, which would be a concise forward-looking policy document. It would contain an analysis of persistent problems and challenges and emerging trends that would need to be addressed by the international community within the next four to six years and the role of the Organization in that undertaking. The perspective would indicate broad priority areas for the work of the Organization; it would be amended only if pressing needs of an unforeseeable nature arose during the period covered;

(b) A programme framework, which would list only major programmes and subprogrammes and would provide guidelines against which the preparation and implementation of the budget would be assessed. The narrative of each programme should consist of a brief one-page chapter detailing its objectives and mandates. The programme framework should be reviewed regularly every two years in the off-budget year in an effective manner to reflect new mandates.

4. The plan would thus state clearly the Organization's strategic imperatives and would be amended only when a change in strategic direction was required.

5. The prototype is presented and discussed below. In order for the Organization to operate efficiently strategic planning is essential. The value of strategic planning is first and foremost in the process itself; a strategic plan is not static; objectives must be modified as strategic imperatives change in response to changed circumstances, mandates and other opportunities. Deciding on objectives that must be pursued and on the level of resources to attain such objectives is critical in ensuring that the resources of the Organization are used in an optimal manner. The new format is designed to enhance strategic planning, to permit the establishment of a link between the objectives to be formulated in the plan and the allocation of resources among programmes and the evaluation of the results.

Perspective

6. The perspective would identify the challenges and problems to be addressed, provide broad directions for action in line with legislative intent and reflect the orientation and expectations of Member States. It would cover a period of four years, beginning 1998. It would be presented according to the following structure:

(a) Emerging trends. These would be derived from an analysis of the situation;

(b) Identification of major challenges and problems. This would address the issues faced by the international community, based on the emerging trends;

(c) Role of the Organization. This would identify the contributions that the Organization could make in addressing those issues;

(d) Directions to be pursued. This would outline in broad terms the courses of action that would need to be taken.

The comprehensive nature of the perspective and its broad policy dimension would be such that it would not lend itself to the preparation of a model.

Programme framework

7. The programmes contained in the current medium-term plan are presented along sectoral lines; they do not necessarily relate to the organizational structure and many programmes have heretofore crossed organizational lines. In order to foster the link between the plan and the programme budget, congruence between the programmatic and organizational structures of the Secretariat is desirable and the restructuring of the Secretariat now facilitates this congruence. Congruence would also enhance accountability by ensuring that responsibility is clearly identified for the delivery of a programme and for achieving the results the programme is meant to produce.

8. As recommended by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, each programme would consist of a short narrative. This narrative would identify the mandates, which provide overall direction for the programme and therefore govern the overall work of the department/office responsible for the programme. It would describe the broad approach to be followed by the department/office in carrying out the work and the results that are expected to be achieved in pursuance of the mandates. It would cover a period of four years.

9. Each programme would contain subprogrammes. Each subprogramme would cover an area of activity entrusted to a major organizational unit within a department or office. The objectives and expected results of the subprogramme to be achieved at the end of four years would be identified. The subprogramme would provide the framework for the preparation and implementation of the programme budget. In the programme budget, each subprogramme would be structured in such a way as to indicate (a) the expected results to be attained in the biennium in the light of the objective; (b) the inputs required to achieve the results; (c) the main differences between the activities in the current and proposed programme budgets; and (d) the resources required.

10. On the basis of the considerations outlined above, the programme framework would be congruent with organizational lines and the strategic imperatives set forth in the programme of the organizational unit would comprise its mission statement. A prototype of a programme, using Economic and social information and policy analysis, is provided in annex I.

11. The individual programmes within the framework, their link to the organizational structure of the Secretariat and the relationship between the programmes as currently defined in the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 and the proposed future programmes are shown in annex II.

12. The current medium-term plan contains 246 subprogrammes. It is expected that, under the approach outlined above, there would be a consolidation of subprogrammes leading to a reduction in their numbers. The prototype contains 4 subprogrammes (compared to 15 in the current medium-term plan). It is estimated that the total number of subprogrammes under the new format of the medium-term plan would be in the range of 150, but this can only be determined as each programme is subjected to the analytical scrutiny similar to that given to the prototype. This new approach will not have an impact on mandated activities.

13. Should the General Assembly approve the proposed new format of the medium-term plan, the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 would be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-first session, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/47/16), part two, para. 21.

2/ Ibid., Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/48/16), part two, para. 233.

3/ Ibid., Supplement No. 6 (A/47/6/Rev.1).

ANNEX I

Prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan

PROGRAMME. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INFORMATION AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Mission statement

The overall objectives of this programme are to assist not only Governments but also private sector entities, non-governmental organizations and individuals in determining development priorities at the international, national and local levels, and to contribute to devising policies and measures aimed at fulfilling them. The Secretariat seeks to achieve this primarily by contributing to those agents' knowledge and understanding of development processes and the consequences of their actions through the provision of economic and social information and through the analysis of development issues and policies.

* * *

1. The Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis will be responsible for the implementation of this programme and for the achievement of its objectives.

2. The mandate for the programme lies in the responsibilities entrusted to the Secretariat by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and certain of its subsidiary bodies, for the elaboration of economic and social data, for the analysis of development issues, trends and policies, and for the execution of technical cooperation activities in certain of those areas. More specifically, the general orientation and broad objectives of the programme derive from General Assembly resolutions 118 (II), 3362 (S-VII), 32/197, 39/228, 45/264 and 46/335; chapter 40, programme A, of Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development; and Economic and Social Council resolutions 3 (III), 8 (I) and 8 (II).

3. The activities under this programme include:

(a) The collection, compilation and dissemination of economic, social and demographic statistics and the dissemination of new statistical data-processing technologies;

(b) The development of statistical concepts and methods;

(c) The elaboration of projections and the identification and analysis of new and emerging economic and social issues;

(d) The analysis of long-term social and economic issues, including the relationships between population and development;

(e) The monitoring and assessment, from a global perspective, of economic and social developments and policies, in particular those relating to international cooperation;

(f) The provision of technical cooperation in population and statistics.

4. It is anticipated that, during the plan period, this programme will assist Member States in determining development priorities and in devising strategies and actions to accomplish them.

Subprogramme 1. Statistics

5. The Secretariat has contributed to the great progress that has been made over the years in the international collection, standardization, analysis and dissemination of economic, social and related data. A major objective of this subprogramme will be to sustain those United Nations data systems that remain relevant. For example, given the increasing integration and globalization of the world economy, reinforced by the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, an increasing number of decision makers at all levels will continue to require data on international transactions. One specific objective for the plan period will therefore be to sustain the long-standing function of the United Nations as a global centre for data on international trade. The COMTRADE database will be not only maintained but also improved in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The same will apply to systems dedicated to industry, energy, transport, national accounts and demographic statistics.

6. A milestone was passed with the finalization of the 1993 System of National Accounts. A major objective of this subprogramme will be to maximize the number of countries that are in a position to implement the new System by the end of the plan period. To that end, the Secretariat, in close collaboration with other international organizations, will continue to undertake a variety of activities to promote the System, including training and other forms of technical cooperation.

7. A third objective of the subprogramme will be to improve the world community's ability to measure the environmental impact of human activity and expenditures related to the environment. This will require attention to be given to the development of concepts, methods and classifications for such data. A related sub-objective will be to continue work on indicators of sustainable development, with a view to obtaining international agreement on the usefulness and applicability of such measures.

8. In conjunction with the objective in subprogramme 1 of strengthening the links between the economic and social dimensions of development, a fourth objective of the subprogramme will be to make quantitative and qualitative improvements in the availability of indicators of social well-being.

9. This subprogramme is expected to result in improvements in the usefulness and accessibility of many traditional international economic and social data to policy makers and others. It will result in a qualitative broadening in the availability of international statistics and increased usefulness for policy makers.

Subprogramme 2. Population

10. The International Conference on Population and Development took place at a time when the absolute increase in the world population had reached an all-time record of 90 million people annually. Annual increments are likely to exceed that number for the next two decades. That situation presents many development challenges and choices. The primary objectives of subprogramme 2 will be to increase understanding of the precise nature of those challenges, particularly the interrelationships between population and development, and thereby to assist in formulating responses to them. To that end, the subprogramme will prepare population estimates and projections, will examine changes in demographic variables and will assess the consequences of those changes for socio-economic development. It will also examine policies designed to influence population trends.

11. In addition to unprecedented increases in the world population, there are also large migrations of people from country to country and from region to region. Migration can be of benefit to the communities of both origin and destination, but this will often require appropriate national and international policies and measures. To assist in the formulation of such policies, a further objective of the subprogramme will be to improve knowledge of the nature and scope of such movements and to analyse their economic and social causes and implications.

12. A further objective of the subprogramme will be to assist Governments in improving their own capabilities in the collection and analysis of demographic data. This will be accomplished through the provision of technical cooperation.

13. This subprogramme is expected to increase Governments' understanding of demographic trends and issues, thereby contributing to the formulation of population and related policies and to the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development.

Subprogramme 3. Global development issues and policies

14. A key feature of the period covered by this plan will be continuing change in perceptions of development, in the circumstances under which development has to take place and in the means to achieve it. The primary objective of subprogramme 3 will be to assist the world community, collectively or otherwise, in identifying emerging global challenges in the field of economic and social development. To that end, the subprogramme will prepare projections and provide global overviews of development problems and prospects, together with detailed analyses on a number of specific topics in which progress seems likely to be attainable in the framework of, or as a result of initiative by, the United Nations.

15. A further objective of the subprogramme will be to encourage the world community to devote greater attention to the interrelationships between the political, economic and social dimensions of development. The Secretariat will seek to achieve this by providing information and analysis on those relationships, based in part on United Nations field experience. Activities to that end will include analysing the additional development challenges that arise

in conflict and post-conflict situations, assisting in the assessment of the economic impact of sanctions and coercive measures, and providing substantive support on such questions to the political affairs and peace-keeping programmes.

16. It is anticipated that this subprogramme will contribute to enhanced understanding of development issues and problems and therefore to improved national and international policies in this area.

Subprogramme 4. Micro-economic issues and policies

17. The objective of subprogramme 4 will be to assist economic actors in devising ways of increasing efficiency and growth through the use of market mechanisms. The Secretariat seeks to achieve this by disseminating information and policy-oriented analysis on the role, potential and shortcomings of market solutions to problems of allocation, distribution and regulation. It will examine experiences with the application of market principles and market-oriented reforms, for example to goods and services that have traditionally been provided by the public sector and to systems of transfers and redistribution for addressing such public concerns as poverty and inequality. It will also address, from both the national and international perspectives, such questions as the location of economic activity.

18. This subprogramme is expected to contribute to enhanced understanding of the role of market mechanisms in economic development and to provide guidance in the formulation of policies in that area, particularly at the national level.

ANNEX II

Programme structure and relationship to the current medium-term plan

Programme 1. Political affairs

The Department of Political Affairs would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. Programme 1 would comprise elements that are currently covered in subprogrammes 1 and 3 of programme 1 of the current medium-term plan, Good offices, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, research and the collection of information. The following programmes of the current medium-term plan would also be subsumed under the programme: 2, Political and Security Council affairs; 3, General Assembly affairs; subprogrammes 1, 2 and 3 of programme 4, Political affairs; 5, Question of Palestine; 6, Elimination of apartheid; and 7, Disarmament.

Programme 2. Peace-keeping operations

The Department for Peace-keeping Operations would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. Programme 2 would comprise elements that currently constitute subprogramme 2 of programme 1 of the current medium-term plan, Good offices, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, research and the collection of information, and would also include subprogramme 4 of programme 4, Political affairs, and subprogramme 3, Field operations support, of programme 43 of the current medium-term plan.

Programme 3. Peaceful uses of outer space

The Office for Outer Space Affairs would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 8, Peaceful uses of outer space.

Programme 4. Legal affairs

The Office of Legal Affairs would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. Programme 4 would incorporate programmes 9, International law, and 10, Law of the sea and ocean affairs, of the current medium-term plan.

Programme 5. Policy coordination and sustainable development

The Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. Programme 5 would cover elements from the following programmes of the current medium-term plan: 11, Overall issues and policies, including coordination; 12, Global development issues and policies; 17, Science and technology for development; 19, Natural resources; 20, Energy; 25, Global social issues and policies; 26, Integration of social groups; 27, Advancement of women; and 45, Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development.

Programme 6. Economic and social information and policy analysis

The Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programmes under the current medium-term plan are programmes 18, Population, and 24, Statistics, and elements of programme 12, Global development issues and policies.

Programme 7. Development support and management services

The Department for Development Support and Management Services would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. Programme 7 would include programme 21, Public administration and finance, and elements of the following programmes of the current medium-term plan: 12, Global development issues and policies; 19, Natural resources; 20, Energy; 25, Global social issues and policies; and 26, Integration of social groups.

Programme 8. Crime prevention and criminal justice

The Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 29, Crime prevention and criminal justice.

Programme 9. Environment

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 16, Environment.

Programme 10. Human settlements

The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 22, Human settlements.

Programme 11. Trade and development

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. In so doing, it would be assisted, where applicable, by the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT. The programme will encompass the following programmes of the current medium-term plan: 13, Trade and development; 14, Trade expansion, export promotion and service sector development; 15, Least developed, land-locked and island developing countries, and special programmes; 17, Science and technology for development; and 23, Transnational corporations.

Programme 12. Regional cooperation for development in Africa

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The programme would include programme 30 of the current medium-term plan, Regional cooperation for development in Africa, and subprogramme 2, Monitoring, assessment and follow-up of the implementation

of action programmes, including their financial aspects, of programme 45, Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development.

Programme 13. Regional cooperation for development in Asia and the Pacific

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 31, Regional cooperation for development in Asia and the Pacific.

Programme 14. Regional cooperation for development in Europe

The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 32, Regional cooperation for development in Europe.

Programme 15. Regional cooperation for development in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 33, Regional cooperation for development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Programme 16. Regional cooperation for development in Western Asia

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 34, Regional cooperation for development in Western Asia.

Programme 17. International drug control

The United Nations International Drug Control Programme would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 28, International drug control.

Programme 18. Human rights

The Centre for Human Rights would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 35, Promotion and protection of human rights.

Programme 19. Humanitarian affairs

The Department for Humanitarian Affairs would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programme under the current medium-term plan is programme 37, Emergency humanitarian assistance.

Programme 20. Protection and assistance to refugees

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The programme would include elements of programme 36 of the current medium-term plan, International protection of and assistance to refugees.

Programme 21. Palestine refugees

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The programme would include elements of programme 36 of the current medium-term plan, International protection of and assistance to refugees.

Programme 22. Public information

The Department of Public Information would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programmes under the current medium-term plan are programme 38, Public information, and part of programmes 39, Conference and library services, 44, Services to the public, and 45, Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development.

Programme 23. Administrative services

The Department of Administration and Management would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The corresponding programmes under the current medium-term plan are programmes 39, Conference and library services (part); 40, Administrative direction and management (part); 41, Human resources management; 42, Programme planning, budget and finance (part); 43, General services (part); and 44, Services to the public (part).

Programme 24. Internal oversight

The Office of Internal Oversight Services would be responsible for the implementation of this programme. The programme would include parts of the following programmes of the current medium-term plan: 40, Administrative direction and management, and 42, Programme planning, budget and finance.